

72 German Slang Words & Expressions For Beginners

LearnOutLive · Saturday, April 22nd, 2023



If you've ever wondered why your [German textbook](#) doesn't quite prepare you for real-life conversations, you're not alone. Learning a language involves more than just grammar and vocabulary—it's about understanding the culture and colloquialisms that make the language come alive.

In this guide, we'll dive into the colorful world of German slang, where language, culture, and history intersect.

Introduction

German slang, like slang in any language, is influenced by various factors, such as [regional dialects](#), youth culture, and even globalization. Slang words and phrases often emerge from the creative use of language by younger generations, who tend to play with words and bend the rules of traditional grammar.

Over time, slang evolves, and some words or phrases become outdated, while new ones take their place. This dynamic aspect of slang makes it a fascinating area of language study, as it reflects the ever-changing nature of human

communication and cultural trends.

“What is slang in one age sometimes goes into the vocabulary of the purist in the next.” — Thomas Bailey Aldrich

It’s essential to know when to use slang and when to avoid it. In formal settings or when addressing someone you don’t know well, it’s best to stick to standard German. However, in casual conversations with friends or acquaintances, using slang can make you sound more natural and approachable.

Regional Slang

Northern Slang

- **Moin** (Hello)

“Moin” is a short, friendly greeting commonly used in northern Germany. It derives from the Low German word “moi” meaning “good.” Although often associated with the morning, “Moin” can be used throughout the day to greet friends and strangers alike.

- **Moinsen** (Hello)

“Moinsen” is a variation of “Moin” that adds a playful touch to the original greeting. It’s a casual way to say hello and is often used among friends or in informal settings.

- **Tach** (Hello)

“Tach” is another regional greeting, primarily used in North Rhine-Westphalia. It’s a shortened version of “Tag,” which means “day” in German. Like “Moin,” it can be used at any time of the day.

- **Büx** (pants)

“Büx” is a slang term for pants or trousers, originating from the northern regions of Germany. The word is derived from the Low German word “Büxe,” which means “box” or “container,” possibly referring to the pants as a container for

one's legs.

Southern Slang

- **Servus** (Hello)

“Servus” is a popular greeting in southern Germany, Austria, and parts of Switzerland. It’s a versatile expression, used to say both hello and goodbye. The word has its origins in Latin, where “servus” means “servant” or “slave,” suggesting a humble, friendly demeanor.

- **Grüß Gott!** (Hello)

“Grüß Gott!” is a traditional Austrian greeting that translates to “Greet God” in English. While it has religious connotations, it’s used as a polite way to say hello in Austria, southern Germany, and parts of Switzerland. The expression reflects the region’s strong Catholic traditions.

- **Grüezi** (Hello)

“Grüezi” is a Swiss German greeting, used predominantly in eastern and northern Switzerland. It’s a contraction of “Gott grüez i,” which means “God greet you” in English. Like “Grüß Gott!” in Austria, “Grüezi” reflects the region’s strong religious traditions.

- **Grüessech** (Hello)

“Grüessech” is another Swiss German greeting, primarily used in the western parts of Switzerland. It’s a contraction of “Gott grüess ech,” which also translates to “God greet you” in English. Both “Grüezi” and “Grüessech” are polite ways to say hello in their respective regions and reflect the local culture and linguistic nuances.

Hessian Slang

- **Ei Gude!** (Hello)

“Ei Gude!” is a regional greeting in Hessian dialect, spoken in the state of Hesse in central Germany. The expression can be used at any time of the day and is often considered a more laid-back, informal greeting.

- **Babbeln** (to chat)

“Babbeln” is a Hessian slang term for chatting or talking. The word is derived from the verb “babbeln,” which means “to babble” in German. It’s a colloquial way to describe having a conversation or engaging in small talk.

“Slang is a language that rolls up its sleeves, spits on its hands and goes to work.” – Carl Sandburg

Loan Words & Urban Slang

Yiddish Influence

Yiddish, a West Germanic language with Hebrew roots, was widely spoken among Ashkenazi Jews in Germany before World War II, and its vocabulary and syntax have left a lasting imprint on the German language.

There are innumerable [Yiddish words in German](#), such as “malochen” (to work) and “zocken” (to game), and they’re often used to convey a sense of humor or irony.

11 Yiddish Words in German And Their Ancient Hebrew Origins

Kiezdeutsch

Kiezdeutsch is a socio- or ethnolect spoken by some German-Turkish or German-Arab youth. It often uses code-switching, mixing Turkish, Arabic and German words within the same sentence, as in “Wallah, ich schwör! – “I swear!”. Other examples are Turkish loanwords such as “Babo” (boss, originally meaning father), “Abi” (older brother), “Lan” (dude), etc.

Another notable feature is syntactical, where [prepositions](#) and declension are dropped: “Ich gehe in den Supermarkt” becomes “Ich gehe Supermarkt”, or “Ich werde am fünften März 19” morphs into “Ich werde fünfter März 19.” Language

purists sometimes decry Kiezdeutsch as “broken German”, but it remains a staple of modern German slang.

The influence of Kiezdeutsch on German slang has been significant, particularly among young people in urban areas. It has been propelled into mainstream culture through rap music by artists like [Haftbefehl](#) (listener discretion is advised):

Decrypting Kiezdeutsch can be a real challenge, even for native speakers. In the above song “Chabos” is a term from Romani or [Rotwelsch](#) and means something like “buddies/homies” in German slang. So “Chabos wissen, wer der Babo ist” means something to the effect of: “All my homies know who’s boss.”

Youth and Colloquial Slang

Greetings and Exclamations

- **Alter** (Dude)

“Alter” is a colloquial term used among friends, similar to “dude” or “mate” in English. It’s derived from the German word for “old” but has evolved into an informal term of address, often used to express surprise or disbelief.

- **Alles fit?** (Everything okay?)

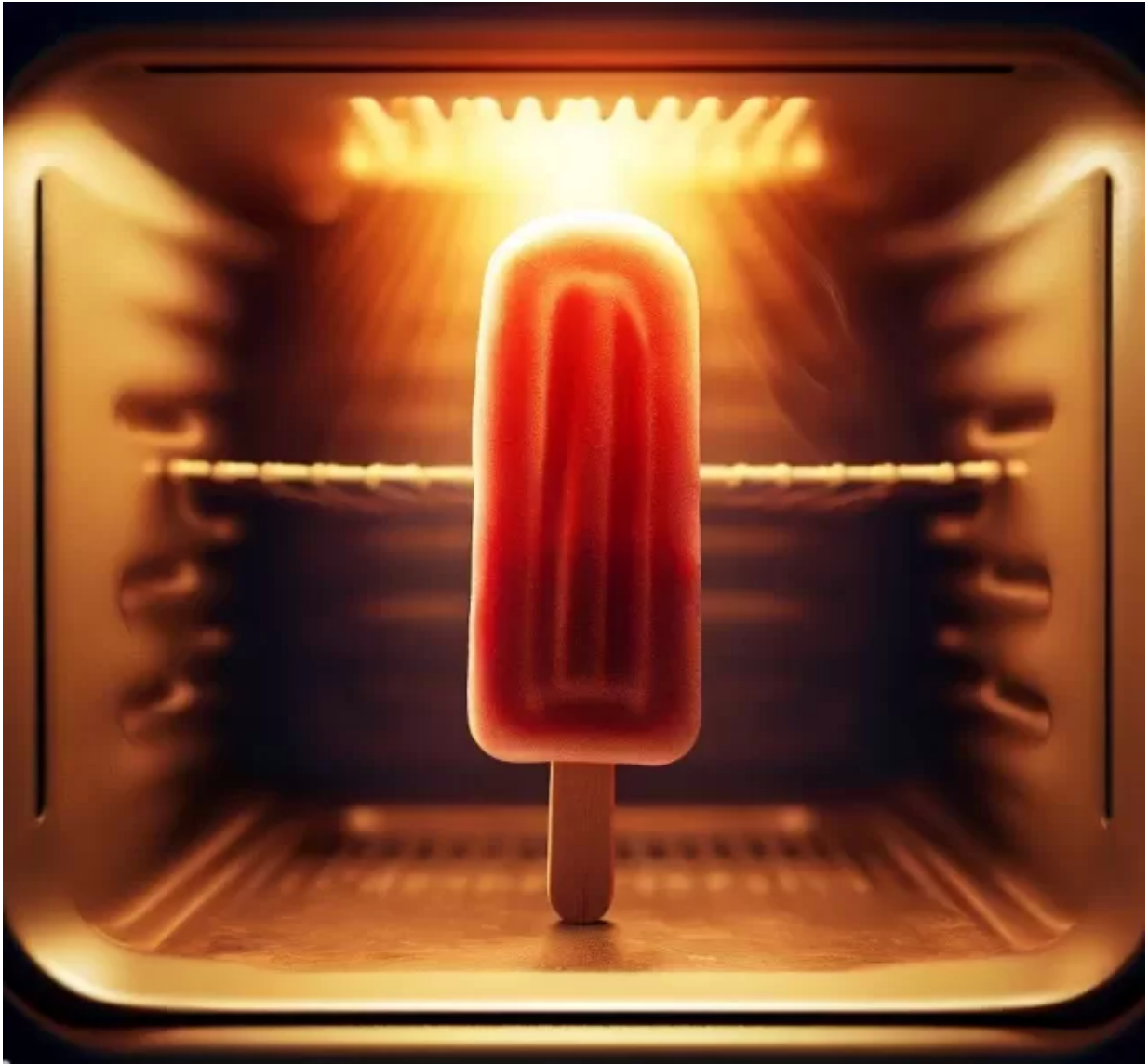
“Alles fit?” is a casual way to ask someone how they’re doing. It’s a combination of “alles,” which means “everything,” and “fit,” which means “in good shape” or “healthy.” The phrase is often used among friends or in informal settings.

- **Was geht ab?!** (What’s up?)

“Was geht ab?” is a casual greeting that can be translated as “what’s going on?” or “what’s up?” It’s often used among friends or in informal settings to ask how someone is doing or what they’re up to.

- **Bleib mal locker!** (Stay cool, relax)

“Bleib mal locker” is an informal expression used to tell someone to stay calm or relax. It’s a combination of “bleib,” which means “stay,” and “locker,” which means “loose” or “relaxed.” The phrase is often used in response to someone getting overly excited or agitated.



- **Back dir ein Eis!** (Chill out!)

“Back dir ein Eis” is a humorous way to tell someone to chill out or take it easy. It literally translates to “bake yourself an ice cream,” which is, of course, an impossible task. The phrase is often used in a lighthearted manner to diffuse tension or remind someone not to take things too seriously.

- **Auf jeden!** (Definitely!)

This expression translates to “definitely” or “for sure.” It’s a casual way to agree with someone or express certainty about something. For example, “Willst du heute Abend ins Kino gehen?” “Auf jeden!” (“Do you want to go to the movies tonight?” “Definitely!”)

- **Auf keinsten!** (No way!)

This phrase is the opposite of “auf jeden” and means “no way” or “not at all.” It’s used to express strong disagreement or to decline something. For example, “Glaubst du, dass er gewinnt?” “Auf keinsten!” (“Do you think he’ll win?” “No way!”)

- **Das ist bescheuert!** (That’s ridiculous!)

“Das ist bescheuert” is a slang expression used to describe something that’s ridiculous or nonsensical. “Bescheuert” is a colloquial term that can be translated as “stupid” or “idiotic.” The phrase is often used to express disbelief or disapproval.

- **Quatsch** (Nonsense)

“Quatsch” is a slang term that means “nonsense” or “rubbish.” It can be used to dismiss an idea or statement as being untrue or nonsensical. Example: “Das ist doch Quatsch!” (“That’s nonsense!”)

Expressions about Feelings and Actions

- **auf etwas Bock haben** (to be up for something)

“Auf etwas Bock haben” is a slang phrase used to express enthusiasm or interest in doing something. It translates to “to have a goat for something,” which might sound strange, but “Bock” is also a colloquial term for “desire” or “appetite.” The expression is often used among friends when making plans or suggesting activities.

- **dabei sein** (to be in, to join)

“Dabei sein” is an informal way to say that you’re in or you’re joining an activity or event. It’s a combination of “dabei,” which means “with it” or “in it,” and “sein,” which means “to be.” The phrase is often used to show agreement or enthusiasm for participating in something.

Example: “Wenn ihr ins Kino geht, bin ich dabei!” (“If you’re going to the movies, I’m in!”)

- **jemandem auf den Zeiger gehen** (To get on someone’s nerves)

“Jemandem auf den Zeiger gehen” is a slang expression that translates to “to go on someone’s pointer.” It means to get on someone’s nerves or to annoy them.

The phrase is often used in casual conversations to express irritation or frustration with someone's behavior.

- **abdrehen** (to freak out)

“Abdrehen” is a slang term that means “to freak out” or “to go crazy.” It can be used to describe someone who is overreacting or losing control of themselves. Example: “Er dreht total ab, wenn er gestresst ist.” (“He freaks out when he’s stressed.”)

- **versauen** (to mess up)

This verb means “to mess up” or “to ruin” something. It’s often used in reference to making a mistake or causing a negative outcome. For example, “Er hat die Prüfung total versaut” means “He totally messed up the exam.”

- **abkackern** (to fail)

This slang term is used to describe failing or performing poorly at something. For example, “Bei der Präsentation ist er total abgekackt” means “He completely bombed during the presentation.”

- **zocken** (to gamble or play games)

“Zocken” is a slang term for gambling or playing games. Example: “Er zockt die ganze Nacht Videospiele.” (“He plays video games all night long.”) As discussed previously, this is from the Hebrew “lesachek” (to game).

- **bespaßen** (to entertain or amuse)

“Bespaßen” is a slang term for entertaining or amusing someone, often in the context of a dinner party. Example: “Er hat uns den ganzen Abend bespaßt.” (“He entertained us the entire evening.”)

- **betüddeln** (to pamper or spoil)

“Betüddeln” is a slang term for pampering or spoiling someone, most commonly heard in the North. Example: “Sie betüddelt ihre Gäste immer mit den besten Speisen und Getränken.” (“She always spoils her guests with the best food and drinks.”)

- **bummeln** (to stroll or saunter)

“Bummeln” is a slang term for strolling or sauntering, often in the context of window-shopping or dining out. Example: “Lass uns durch die Stadt bummeln und ein Eis essen.” (“Let’s stroll through the city and eat an ice cream.”)

- **fachsimpeln** (to talk shop or engage in expert discussions)

“Fachsimpeln” is a slang term for talking shop or engaging in expert discussions, often over food or drinks. Example: “Wir haben über Fotografie gefachsimpelt, während wir ein Bier getrunken haben.” (“We talked shop about photography while we had a beer.”)

- **der Brüller** (a howler)

“Brüller” is a slang term for a very funny joke or story, also known as a howler. Example: “Sein Witz war ein echter Brüller!” (“His joke was a real howler!”)

- **der Lachflash** (a fit of laughter)

“Lachflash” is a slang term for a sudden fit of laughter. Example: “Ich hatte einen Lachflash, als er seine Hose zerriss.” (“I had a fit of laughter when he ripped his pants.”)

- **die Faxen** (jokes or antics)

“Faxen” is a slang term for jokes or antics. Example: “Hör auf, Faxen zu machen, und konzentriere dich!” (“Stop making jokes and focus!”)

- **gewieft** (shrewd, cunning, or clever)

“Gewieft” is a slang term for someone who is shrewd, cunning, or clever. Example: “Sie ist eine gewieftete Geschäftsfrau.” (“She’s a shrewd businesswoman.”)

- **schmollen** (to sulk or pout)

“Schmollen” is a slang term for sulking or pouting. Example: “Sie schmolzt, weil sie nicht gewonnen hat.” (“She’s sulking because she didn’t win.”)

- **putzig** (cute or adorable)

“Putzig” is a slang term for something or someone that is cute or adorable. Example: “Das kleine Kätzchen ist so putzig.” (“The little kitten is so cute.”)

- **schnuffig** (cute or adorable)

“Schnuffig” is another slang term for something or someone that is cute or adorable. Example: “Das Baby ist so schnuffig, ich möchte es die ganze Zeit knuddeln.” (“The baby is so cute, I want to cuddle it all the time.”)

Food and Drink-Related Slang

- **einen Kater haben** (to have a hangover)

“Einen Kater haben” is a slang expression that translates to “to have a tomcat.” It means to have a hangover, suggesting that the aftermath of a night of drinking can feel as rough as dealing with an unruly tomcat. The phrase is often used in casual conversations to describe the unpleasant effects of overindulging in alcohol.

- **dicht** (drunk)

“Dicht” is a slang term for being drunk or intoxicated. It literally means “dense” or “thick” in German, suggesting that one’s mental faculties are clouded or impaired by alcohol. The expression is often used in casual conversations to describe the state of inebriation. A similar word is “breit” (literally “broad”), translating to “stoned” or “drunk”.

- **knuspern** (to crunch)

“Knuspern” is a slang term for crunching, usually in the context of eating crunchy food. Example: “Ich liebe es, Chips zu knuspern.” (“I love to crunch chips.”)

- **futtern** (to feed)

This slang term is used to describe the act of eating in a casual way. For example: “Lass uns etwas futtern gehen” (Let’s go grab something to eat).

- **mampfen** (to munch)

Another casual term for eating, especially when it involves snacking. For instance: “Ich mampfe gerade ein paar Kekse” (I’m munching on some cookies)

right now).

- **schnabulieren** (to feast)

This slang term is used to describe the act of eating with great relish. For example: “Wir schnabulieren ein bisschen Kuchen zum Kaffee” (We’re snacking on some cake with our coffee).

- **die Plörre** (swill)

This slang term refers to a low-quality or unappetizing beverage, often used to describe cheap beer, wine, or coffee. For instance: “Das Bier hier schmeckt wie Plörre” (The beer here tastes like swill).

- **Vorglühen** (pre-gaming, literally “pre-glowing”)

This slang term is used to describe the act of drinking alcohol before going out to a party, club, or event. It is similar to the English term “pre-gaming” or “pre-drinking.” For example: “Wir treffen uns um 20 Uhr zum Vorglühen, bevor wir in den Club gehen” (We’ll meet at 8 PM for pre-gaming before we go to the club).

Compliments and Criticisms

- **Läuft bei dir!** (You’re on a roll!)

“Läuft bei dir!” is a slang expression used to praise someone who’s doing well or experiencing success. It can be translated as “it’s running for you” or “you’re on a roll.” The phrase is often used to express admiration or approval for someone’s achievements or good fortune.

- **mega nervig sein** (to be super annoying)

“Mega nervig sein” is a slang phrase used to describe someone or something that’s super annoying. “Mega” is an intensifier, while “nervig” means “annoying” or “irritating.” The expression is often used among friends to vent frustration or share a common annoyance.

- **Eins A** (top-notch, excellent)

“Eins A” is a slang term used to describe something that’s top-notch or excellent. The expression is often used to praise someone’s work, performance,

or accomplishments.

- **geil oder supergeil** (cool or super cool)

“Geil” and “supergeil” are slang terms used to describe something that’s cool, awesome, or exciting. The word “geil” originally meant “horny” in German, but its meaning has evolved to include positive connotations in a more general sense. The phrase is often used among friends to express enthusiasm or admiration for something or someone.

- **Gönn dir!** (Treat yourself!)

“Gönn dir” is used to encourage someone to indulge in something they like or to take a break and relax. The addition of “Brudi” (a slang term derived from “Bruder,” which means “brother”) makes the phrase even more informal and friendly, as in “Gönn dir, Brudi” or “Treat yourself, bro.”

- **abgefahren** (awesome, cool)

“Abgefahren” is a slang term used to describe something that’s cool, awesome, or extraordinary. It’s derived from the verb “abfahren,” which means “to depart” or “to leave.” In this context, it suggests that something is so amazing that it’s leaving the ordinary behind. Example: “Das Konzert gestern war total abgefahren!” (“The concert yesterday was totally far-out!”)

- **etepetete** (fussy or picky)

“Etepetete” is a slang term for someone who is fussy or picky, especially in regard to food or dining preferences. Example: “Er ist so etepetete, er isst nur Bio-Lebensmittel.” (“He’s so picky, he only eats organic food.”)

- **der Abklatsch** (imitation/copycat)

“Abklatsch” is a slang term that means “imitation” or “copycat.” It can be used to describe something or someone that is trying to imitate or copy something else, often in a negative way. Example: “Das ist doch nur ein billiger Abklatsch des Originals.” (“That’s just a cheap imitation of the original.”)

- **der Hirni** (Slow-witted or unintelligent person)

“Hirni” is a slang term for a person who is slow-witted or unintelligent.

Example: “Er versteht nie, worum es geht. Er ist ein Hirni.” (“He never understands what’s going on. He’s a slow-witted person.”)

- **der Horst** (dork)

“Horst” is a slang term that means “dork” or “nerd.” It’s used to describe someone who is socially awkward or uncool. Example: “Er ist so ein Horst, immer mit seinen Büchern.” (“He’s such a dork, always with his books.”)

- **der Pfosten** (idiot)

“Pfosten” is a slang term that means “idiot” or “fool.” It’s used to describe someone who is acting stupid or foolish. Example: “Er hat seine Schlüssel im Auto gelassen. Was für ein Pfosten!” (“He left his keys in the car. What an idiot!”) An even stronger expression is “**Vollpfosten**” which translates to something like “complete fool”.

- **die Lusche** (weak or ineffectual person)

“Lusche” is a slang term for a weak or ineffectual person. Example: “Er gibt immer gleich auf. Er ist eine echte Lusche.” (“He always gives up immediately. He’s a real weakling.”)

Finance-Related

- **die Kohle** (money, literally “coal”)

“Kohle” is a slang term for money. It literally means “coal” in German, possibly implying that money, like coal, is a valuable resource that fuels our lives.

- **die Asche** (money, literally “ash”)

This slang term is used to refer to money in general. It’s an informal way of talking about cash. For example: “Er hat viel Asche ausgegeben, um das neue Auto zu kaufen” (He spent a lot of money to buy the new car).

- **der Schotter** (money, literally “gravel”)

Another informal term for money, “Schotter” is used in casual conversations. For instance: “Er hat einen Haufen Schotter für diese Uhr bezahlt” (He paid a ton of money for that watch).

- **betucht** (wealthy or well-off)

“Betucht” is a slang term for someone who is wealthy or well-off. Example: “Sie kommt aus einer betuchten Familie.” (“She comes from a wealthy family.”) This is another Yiddish influence from the Hebrew (???????) (batuach) which means “sure” or “trustworthy”.

- **der Bonze** (big shot)

“Bonze” is a slang term that refers to someone who is wealthy, powerful, or influential. It’s similar to the English terms “big shot” or “bigwig.” Example: “Er hält sich für einen Bonzen, nur weil er ein teures Auto hat.” (“He thinks he’s a big shot just because he has an expensive car.”)

- **blechen** (to pay)

“Blechen” is a slang term for paying, e.g. for food or drinks. Example: “Er hat die ganze Nacht für uns geblecht.” (“He paid for us the entire night.”)

Everyday Life and Relationships

- **der Paps** (Dad)

“Paps” is an informal term for “father” or “dad.” It’s similar to the English terms “pop” or “pops.” Example: “Mein Paps arbeitet bei einer Bank.” (“My dad works at a bank.”)

- **die Mutti** (Mom)

“Mutti” is an informal term for “mother” or “mom.” It’s a term of endearment and can be used affectionately to refer to one’s mother. Example: “Mutti, ich brauche Hilfe bei meinen Hausaufgaben.” (“Mom, I need help with my homework.”)

- **funzen** (to work/function)

“Funzen” is a slang term that means “to work” or “to function.” It is used to describe when something is operating correctly or as expected. Example: “Mein Handy funzt nicht mehr richtig.” (“My phone isn’t working properly anymore.”)

- **der Hingucker** (an eye-catcher, something that attracts attention)

“Hingucker” is a slang term for something that catches the eye or attracts attention. Example: “Ihr neues Kleid ist ein echter Hingucker.” (“Her new dress is a real eye-catcher.”)

- **spitze** (great, fantastic)

“Spitze” is a slang term used to describe something that’s great, fantastic, or exceptional. It literally means “tip” or “peak” in German, implying that something is at the top of its game or the best it can be. The expression is often used to praise someone or something, expressing enthusiasm or admiration.

- **jemandem den Laufpass geben** (to break up with someone)

“Jemandem den Laufpass geben” is a slang expression that translates to “to give someone the running pass.” It means to break up with someone or end a relationship. The phrase is often used in casual conversations to describe the act of ending a romantic relationship or friendship.

- **krass** (Intense, crazy)

“Krass” is a slang term used to describe something that’s intense, crazy, or extreme. It can be used both positively and negatively, depending on the context. The expression is often used among friends to emphasize the intensity or extremity of a situation, experience, or emotion.

In conclusion, German slang adds a layer of richness and depth to the language, allowing speakers to express themselves more vividly and authentically.

By understanding and incorporating these slang expressions into your conversations, you’ll be able to connect with native speakers on a deeper level and fully immerse yourself in the colorful world of modern German.